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SUBJECT: Uruguay: Disaster Alert Cable for DCHA/OFDA

Background

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11. (U) A number of departments in the interior of Uruguay have experienced widespread flooding following heavy rains throughout the country beginning mid-November. The flooding has primarily affected the northwest of the country, with the heaviest damage in Artigas and Salto departments, which are bordered by the Uruguay and Cuareim rivers. The departments of Tacuarembó, Rivera, Durazno, Cerro Largo, Treinta y Tres, and Paysandu have also been affected.

12. (U) According to media reports, 3,611 Uruguayans have been evacuated from their homes, with 1,781 of those in the department of Artigas alone. The Ministry of Public Health has warned of possible hygiene risks due to water contamination and close living quarters for those in shelters.

13. (U) While the Uruguayan government has not yet officially declared a state of emergency, it has directed USD 300,000 towards purchasing materials for evacuees, and has created two bank accounts so that Uruguayans may donate to the relief effort. The Red Cross is also accepting donations at its national headquarters in Montevideo.

14. (U) Although skies are currently clear, more rain is expected throughout the country in the next several days, with a 50-60 percent chance of rain projected for northern Uruguay through December 2. Water levels have reached record highs, with the level at the Salto Grande Dam expected to rise to the maximum of 37 meters November 25.

Offer of Assistance to GOU

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15. (U) Post, with OFDA concurrence, contacted Colonel Carlos Lorente, coordinator of Uruguay's National Emergency System, with an offer of USD 10,000 in emergency humanitarian assistance funds for the purchase of necessary materials. Lorente declined the offer, however, saying the disaster has not yet exceeded the Uruguayan government's capacity to respond.

16. (U) Post will maintain daily contact with Colonel Lorente in the event that assistance may be required. Post is also in regular contact with Jose Stevenazzi, USAID/OFDA Risk Management Specialist for Uruguay.  
MATTHEWMAN